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Running battles break out in Cairo – mob attacks democracy protest while army watches

Andrew Flood

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Following the refusal of Mubarak to resign a mob of his supporters attempted to fight their way into Tahir square in Cairo where anti-Mubarak protests demanding democracy have rallied over the last week. Some of the mob who have been captured were carrying police ID's. The intention appears to be to either drive the democracy protesters off the streets and/or create an excuse for army intervention to 'restore stability,' something the official opposition is now calling for. The UN has issued a statement fearing that 300 have been killed and 500 injured, its unclear if this refers just to today's events.

Live broadcasts from Al Jazeera indicate that there have been serious injuries including a journalist who has been stabbed. Footage showed the attack opening with men mounted on camels and horses charging into the square and into the line of anti-

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government protesters that had linked arms with some people being trampled and some attackers pulled off their horses.

There were reports of armed men with the counter revolutionary mob and the mounted mob was reported as re-grouping among a cluster of military tanks on the square after its initial charge. The mob included several uniformed police men and passed through army lines without any attempt by the army to intervene. Al Jazeera is reporting that protesters who fled the initial attack on the square were ambushed in side streets by men armed with sticks and knives.

The democracy demonstrators successfully defended the square without army support, reports indicate that several of the mounted men were pulled from their horses and beaten and that the rest of the mob were forced to retreat by stone throwing. One reporter in the midst of the fighting said there were so many rocks being thrown that they were like 'birds in the sky.' A barricade of trucks was been placed across the road near the Egyptian museum by the mob but then captured by the democracy protests and the square was being defended from behind this barricade — the street fighting moved back and forth across this barrier.

A journalist reported watching 50 men armed with sticks and machetes charging the cordon protecting the square while the army watched. Gunfire was heard, believed to be the army in the Egyptian museum firing warning shots and a large number of children are trapped in the center of the square. The roads leading into the square was defended for several hours before the government mob gained access to the rooftops above the defenders barricades and rained down rocks and molotov cocktails forcing them to retreat into the square as the army stood by and watched. It was only after 5 or more hours of street battles that the army deployed water cannon.

The exact composition of the mob supporting Mubarak is unknown but AP interviewed some of them in a prosperous Cairo suburb and reported that *"On the boulevard in the upper-class neigh-*

bourhood of Mohandiseen, men in designer sunglasses and women with expensive hairdos joined government employees, including a few dozen nurses in white dresses and stockings who jumped and chanted, "We love you Mubarak!." Other commentators report that those attacking the square include some of the very poor although Police ID cards have been found on a number of those captured. There were claims people had been paid 17\$ to take part. Al Jazeera Arabic showed video demonstrating that some of the pro-government mob who have been captured in the fighting are carrying police ID. A caller to AlJazeera said that her husband who works at the Giza Governorate was called yesterday by his employer & ordered to join the Pro Mubarak demonstration. Those captured are then being handed over to the military. The mob were also using at least 3 army vehicles.

The mob chanted slogans against Al Jazeera and accusing those protesting against the regime of ruining Egypt. A section of the mob approached the Hilton hotel at the edge of the square chanting 'where is Al Jazeera' whose reporters are continuing to report from the scene despite repeated government attempts to shut them down. Journalists were being targetted in general by the mob, in one report among many George Hale, English editor of the Maan News Agency, tweeted that "*Anderson Cooper punched 10 times in the head as pro-Mubarak mob surrounds him and his crew at Cairo rally – CNN manager.*"

The protests against Mubarak have been unarmed except for improvised weapons like rocks that can be picked up from the street. In the event of significant armed attacks by the mob or by the military using the excuse of the mob to intervene it appears they will be unable to defend themselves. However the bulk of the army are drawn from the proletarian classes and may well refuse orders, as some did last week, or even decide to intervene against the mob. In any case this decision by Mubarak to mobilise a counter revolutionary mob must result in an escalation of the revolt and the

beginnings of self defence, perhaps building on the Neighborhood committees that came into existence last week.